

NEWS RELEASE

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Kankakee Man Sentenced to Life in Prison for Car-Jacking and Murder Four Others Charged with Possessing Firearm in "Project Safe Neighborhoods"

Urbana, IL - Chief U.S. District Judge Michael P. McCuskey today sentenced Antonio Sherrod, age 24, to life in prison without parole for the 2003 car-jacking and murder of a Matteson, Illinois man, as announced by Jan Paul Miller, United States Attorney for the Central District of Illinois.

In October 2004, a federal jury found Sherrod guilty of car-jacking with the intent to cause death; carrying and using a firearm to commit first-degree murder; and being a felon in possession of a firearm. During trial, the government presented evidence that shortly before midnight on the night of March 16, 2003, Sherrod used a 9 millimeter, semi-automatic handgun to shoot and kill Steven Prendergast, age 24, of Matteson, Illinois, and steal his 2003 Cadillac Escalade, at a Kankakee gas station.

U.S. Attorney Miller commended Kankakee State's Attorney Ed Smith for his cooperation in the prosecution. "Working with the State's Attorney's office, we determined that federal prosecution provided the most appropriate sentence for this violent crime. This case represents the U.S. Attorney's Office's longstanding commitment to prosecute and incarcerate those who violate existing gun laws to the greatest extent of the law, whether state or federal," said U.S. Attorney Miller.

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The charges are the result of an investigation by the Kankakee City Police Department and its Violent Crimes Task Force; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives; the Illinois State Police; the Kankakee County Sheriff's Department; and the Kankakee Area Metropolitan Enforcement Group, known as KMEG.

During today's sentencing hearing, Assistant U.S. Attorney Timothy A. Bass said that investigators traced the gun used by Sherrod in the car-jacking and murder from its initial purchase from a Champaign, Illinois business, through the hands of others, to its eventual possession by Sherrod.

As a result of that investigation, four other men face federal charges of possession of a firearm by a convicted felon. One of the men charged, Thomas Summers, age 39, of 509 East Beardsley, Champaign, Illinois, pled guilty on February 12, 2004, to being a felon in possession of a firearm. At his plea hearing, Summers admitted he purchased the firearm from a Champaign business on September 19, 2002. Summers' sentencing is scheduled for March 9, 2005.

The second person charged with possession of a firearm by a convicted felon is Corie Coleman, age 27, of Rantoul, Illinois. The indictment, returned by a federal grand jury in October 2003, alleges that in October and November 2002, Coleman possessed the same firearm as that possessed by Summers. Coleman is scheduled for trial on February 22, 2005, in federal court in Urbana.

On February 3, 2005, two other individuals, John Lee, age 28, and Joe Taylor, age 28, both of Kankakee, Illinois, were indicted by a federal grand jury and charged with possession of a firearm by a convicted felon. The indictment charging Lee alleges he possessed a firearm in or about late 2002 and early 2003. Lee is further charged with distribution of crack cocaine on or about September 20, 2003. In a separate indictment, Taylor is charged with possessing a firearm, in or about early 2003.

Members of the public are reminded that an indictment is merely an accusation; the defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty.

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If convicted, the penalty for possession of a firearm by a felon is up to 10 years imprisonment and a fine of \$250,000. The penalty for distribution of crack cocaine is up to 20 years imprisonment and fines up to \$1,000,000 if the defendant has no prior felony drug conviction; the penalty for defendants with a prior felony drug conviction is up to 30 years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$2,000,000.

U.S. Attorney Miller said, “The law is very straightforward; convicted felons cannot possess guns. Those who do are not only breaking the law, but all too often, the guns are used in violent and deadly crimes. Our office will continue to work in partnership with local law enforcement agencies to ensure that felons with guns are aggressively prosecuted and sentenced to the fullest extent of the law.”

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